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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 YEREVAN 001254

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR GENERAL WARD'S SEPTEMBER 19-20
VISIT TO YEREVAN

Classified By: CDA A. F. Godfrey for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

11. (S) SUMMARY: We look forward to welcoming you to Armenia. Armenia and the United States have lately enjoyed increasing trust and military cooperation. While Armenia initially lagged behind its fellow South Caucasus republics in developing relationships with Western nations and Euro-Atlantic institutions, much has changed during the past three years. The signing of a number of important agreements and the presence of Armenian forces in Iraq and Kosovo have helped establish a foundation for deeper military cooperation. Aside from contributions to those arenas, the Armenian military is focused on defending the territory captured from Azerbaijan in the conflict over the ethnically Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh. While negotiations continue, the two sides missed an important opportunity to agree on basic modalities for a resolution to the conflict this summer. Armenia's Defense Minister, currently the front-runner to be Armenia's next president, is not optimistic that the sides will cut a deal anytime soon. END SUMMARY.

ARMENIAN FOREIGN MILITARY POLICY

12. (C) Armenia continues to pursue its foreign policy of "complementarity," maintaining strong relations with Russia and other CIS countries, but balancing those relations with Armenia's goals of improved ties to Western nations and Euro-Atlantic institutions, including the United States, the EU and NATO. Despite the challenges inherent in such a policy, Armenia has been able to deepen its security relationship with both camps. Armenia has leased its military bases in Yerevan and Gyumri to Russia for the long term. While the Russian relationship is the key component of

Armenia,s security policy, Armenia does not wish to rely solely on its traditional ally. The GOAM is gradually expanding cooperation with the United States and NATO, though officials continue to say that Armenia has no plans to join NATO. Armenia agreed to the conduct of a EUCOM defense assessment of the MOD, which was conducted in 2005 and published in January. The MOD has demonstrated good transparency to visiting EUCOM teams, and key senior MOD leaders participated directly in the assessment, ensuring that subordinates provided a corresponding level of openness to the U.S. experts.

13. (C) Further demonstrating its increased openness to the West, Armenia has ratified a NATO Partnership for Peace Status of Forces Agreement and an Article 98 agreement, concluded an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) with the United States, and presented its Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) document to NATO. In light of Armenia's stated intentions to strengthen its security relationship with the West, your visit will also provide an excellent opportunity to challenge Armenia to move to the next level of international cooperation.

ARMENIA'S SUPPORT TO INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS

14. (C) IRAQ: Despite some opposition from ethnic Armenian communities in the Middle East and at home, Armenia deployed a small contingent to Iraq in January 2005. This 46-man contingent consists of a platoon of truck drivers, a squad of deminers, two medical doctors, and one liaison officer at the coalition headquarters in Baghdad. The Armenian contingent

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serves in Multinational Division South-Central, under the command of the Polish division headquarters. The contingent has rotated three times, and the current personnel are due to redeploy to Armenia at the end of 2006.

15. (C) KOSOVO: Armenia recently completed its fourth rotation of peacekeepers in Kosovo. A platoon of 34 Armenian peacekeepers is serving under a Greek battalion there, and Greece is providing significant logistical and financial assistance to support Armenia's participation. In June 2005, Deputy Minister of Defense General-Lieutenant Artur Aghabekian visited Kosovo, marking the first visit there by a senior government official.

16. (C) AFGHANISTAN: The MOD had discussed the idea of sending two or three intelligence officers to Afghanistan to serve on the international staff, but coalition policy is to accept staff intelligence officers only from countries that have troop contingents deployed to Afghanistan. Armenian MOD officials continue discussions with Greece and the Baltic republics to reach a deal whereby Armenia could send a small contingent to Afghanistan within the structure of a larger unit from one of these nations.

17. (C) LEBANON: Despite a significant ethnic Armenian population in Lebanon, the government of Armenia has not made a commitment to offer troops to the United Nations interim force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

STATUS OF NAGORNO-KARABAKH TALKS

18. (C) The Armenian military is focused above all on defending the territory captured from Azerbaijan in the conflict over the ethnically Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic" has its own armed forces, but Armenia also provides significant military support to bolster those forces. U.S. policy continues to prohibit the provision of any military support to Armenia or Azerbaijan that would improve either side's

ability to conduct combat operations against the other. Cease-fire violations on the line of contact occur almost every week, spiking in the spring and fall when both sides move to new trenchline positions in an attempt to gain an advantage. These cease-fire violations always give cause for concern, as does the ramped-up Azerbaijani rhetoric and continued desire to acquire new weapons systems and ammunition.

¶9. (U) Since the failed Minsk Group push for a Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) peace deal this summer, the two sides have resumed name-calling and blame-laying, most recently over fires in Azerbaijani settlements bordering N-K. Azerbaijan accused Armenia of setting the blazes, while the Armenians contended the fires were caused by Azerbaijani tracer bullets fired at Armenian positions. An OSCE monitoring group found that the fires had not been set intentionally, and that they had not harmed any crops or residential areas. The two sides have now agreed in principle to allow an OSCE-UN joint environmental assessment team to visit the affected areas and make a more rigorous, expert judgment, and recommend remediation.

¶10. (S) During his farewell visit with Ambassador Evans, who left post September 10, Defense Minister Serzh Sargsian said the Armenian government had considered withdrawing from the Minsk Group negotiations in order to demonstrate its displeasure with the process. Sargsian told the Ambassador

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he was not optimistic that the parties would reach a solution soon, and accused the Azeris of not negotiating in good faith. He said that a review of the United States' satellite imagery over the past few years would show the steady advance of the Azeri positions and the moving of the line of contact toward the Armenian side. More encouragingly, Sargsian told the outgoing ambassador he did not foresee renewed military conflict between the sides. (NOTE: Sargsian has long been considered Kocharian's heir apparent, though the presidential elections are not slated until 2008. He joined the ruling Republican Party this summer, and said then that if the Republicans and their allies win a majority of National Assembly seats in the 2007 parliamentary elections, he would likely run for president. END NOTE.)
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